

Chapter Nine

The Black Hawk War: A Prophecy Fulfilled

In 1843 while still at Nauvoo, Joseph had been given a Patriarchal Blessing by Hyrum Smith in which he was promised that he would have a large family which would be an honor to his name, and that in time he would be the means of restoring peace between the Mormons and the Indians. At first Hyrum's words were a mystery to Joseph, for he and his wife Eunice had no children and she remained barren throughout their lives. But now that he was settled comfortably at Heber City, Hyrum's promise had been fulfilled at least in part, for Joseph now had 5 wives and 17 children. The remainder of Hyrum Smith's promise would be fulfilled sooner than Joseph could ever expect.

Ever since the hard times spent at Winter Quarters and the long journey across the plains to Utah, Joseph had become more acquainted and experienced with the Indians, and had developed a rapport with them equaled by few of his brethren. At Winter Quarters he bartered for oxen with them when it seemed no one else could make a trade. He was allowed to go free after being captured by the Indians and in turn treated his Lamanite brothers fairly during the trip west. Even during the Indian wars at Utah

Valley he had been spared from killing them, and in turn his life had been spared. And at Carson Valley they sought him out for counsel and allowed him to travel alone through the mountains where others were being murdered. It was as if he was being trained for a greater mission later on.

Wherever Joseph lived all of his Indian brothers admired the way that his wife Pernetta was treated as an equal with his other wives, and they saw how Pick was educated as well as any of his sons. They also knew that Pernetta's children were given every opportunity his other children were given. They found his word to be true in all matters and were always welcome at his home or at any of the sheep and cattle camps his sons operated in the mountains.

As early as 1851 Brigham Young had advocated reserving a large tract of land in the Uintah Basin for the Indians. By 1864 all of the Ute Tribes were being gathered together to be settled in that eastern part of the territory. In 1865 a treaty was made with the Utes, giving them essentially the same Uintah Basin lands that Brigham Young had envisioned for them more than a decade earlier. It consisted of all the land from Heber Valley eastward to the Green River, including the Uintah Mountains. The first Indian Agency was established at the mouth of Daniel's Canyon almost in sight of Joseph's home at Heber City. The settlers at Heber City had little troubles with the Indians except for occasional petty thievery, for Joseph believed in treating them with a policy of "biscuits, not bullets."

During that year, 1865, just as the new reservation was established and an agency opened at Heber Valley, an unfortunate incident at Manti set off an Indian war which quickly spread throughout the entire territory, forcing the abandonment of more than 100 settlements. Jake Arrapeen, a Ute Chief and a brother of Wakara, Tabby and Antonguer watched his father die of smallpox. Arrapeen blamed evil spirits brought by the Mormons for his father's death, and on April 9th, 1865 he rode through the streets of Manti, shouting that he would kill all of the Mormons and eat their cattle.

John Lowry, an interpreter tried to quiet Arrapeen, and in a scuffle pulled him from his horse. Arrapeen rode off in anger and reported to Antonguer, War Chief of the Utes, how he had been assaulted and humiliated by the Mormons. Antonguer had long wanted an excuse to yield to the younger braves who were anxious for war, and on that Sunday he renounced all treaties between his people and the Mormons and led the Utes to war. From that day on his new name given to him as War Chief of the Utes would be synonymous with terror and bloodshed. From that day on he would no longer be called Antonguer, for Mormons would know him ever afterwards as Black Hawk!

Within days attacks were made on towns from St. George to Bear Lake. Lone travelers and stock herders were killed throughout the mountains and deserts. Isolated farms and ranchs were terrorized and burned while entire towns and villages had to be abandoned. Brigham Young ordered everyone to leave their lone farms and gather together at protected forts or walled villages. His orders stated, "To save the lives and property of the people from the marauding

and bloodthirsty bands which surround you, thorough and energetic measures of protection must be taken immediately. Small settlements should be abandoned and the people repair to places that can easily be defended. There should be from 150 to 500 good and efficient men at every settlement, but not less than 150 well armed men. At all places where settlements are maintained, good and substantial forts, with high walls and strong gates should be erected and the people moved into them."(1)

Heber Valley was not exempt from Indian deprivations, although only property damage resulted, while there was no death of any settler living there. As both spiritual and temporal leader of his people, Joseph was responsible for protecting the settlement and making peace if he could with the Indians. His policy of feeding rather than fighting the Indians along with the good example he set with his own Indian family did much to lessen tension. Although many of the younger braves called for war, several of the older and wiser chiefs urged restraint and cooperation. Chief Tabby and Chief Sowiette in particular heeded Joseph's counsel and did much to keep the war low key in the Round Valley area, still, several serious incidents did occur.

During May, 1866 Indians rode down Lake Creek Canyon during the night and stole some 50 head of cattle, driving them up the canyon and across the 10,000' high ridge onto reservation land while the snow was still heavily crusted. The cattle were soon missed and a posse of Minutemen quickly rode in pursuit, but it was mid-day before they reached the upper part of the canyon and by then the snow crust

had melted so that their horses broke through, and the chase had to be abandoned. Brigham Young had informed Joseph of the deprivations at other settlements, so he quickly ordered all those living at isolated homesteads to gather together at the fort at Heber City. Everyone living at Wallsburg hurried to the fort, leaving their little town temporarily deserted.

Brigham Young sent Col. Robert Burton of the Nauvoo Legion with Indian Agent Col. F.H. Head and guide Dimick Huntington to Heber City with 100 head of cattle for Joseph to present to the Indians as a peace offering. He sent Joseph a message that if the Indians were treated fairly, no harm would come to anyone he chose to send with the cattle. A militia of the Heber City "Silver Greys" homeguard was assembled under Captain William Wall, and on May 27th they began driving the cattle across the mountains to the Ute Reservation. Among those chosen to go was Nymphus Murdock, with Benny Norris driving his wagon, and George Bonner, William Forman, George Carlile, Alma Huntington and several others.

When they located Chief Tabby and his warriors near the new agency where it had been moved from Daniel's Canyon to the Duschene River about one mile upstream from present day Tabiona, they tried to deliver the cattle. Guide Dimick Huntington told Chief Tabby that Brigham Young had sent the cattle and that Bishop Murdock had sent a peace message. But immediately the peace mission was surrounded by 300 angry warriors yelling that they wanted Mormon scalps, not beef! Chief Tabby seemed unable to restrain the hot-blooded young warriors, and in spite of Brigham Young's promise that they

would not be harmed, the men of the peace mission moved closer together, standing back to back in a circle to fight to the end if necessary.⁽²⁾

An Indian squaw ran up to where Capt. Wall, Nymphus Murdock and guide Huntington stood at the front of the defense circle, screaming, "I will eat the heart of the Mormon while it is still warm!"⁽³⁾ Just when the end seemed near, the aged and blind Chief Sowiette made his way to Huntington's side and rebuked his braves for their cowardice. Chief Soweitte spoke softly, "You are like a bunch of coyotes thirsting for the blood of a lone sheep. This is a brave man. He has come here to tell us that he is our friend, and doesn't want to kill Indians. He wants peace. You all know he is our friend!"⁽⁴⁾ The warriors began to murmur, but Chief Tabby turned and walked away, and one by one the others followed him until the peace mission stood alone. Brigham Young's promise had been fulfilled.

Although the peace mission hadn't won the hearts of the younger braves, Joseph was satisfied that the Indians had accepted the peace offering, and he recognized an ally in Chief Tabby. He decided that it was important to try again before the opportunity was lost, so he quickly organized a second peace mission to the Utes. On July 8th he sent Col. Wall, his brother Nymphus, George Giles, Moroni Duke, James Hamilton and George Bonner with several others back to the reservation with Nymphus' wagon heavily loaded with supplies he believed the Indians needed, and which would demonstrate his good faith. But unknown to all, a near tragedy was in the making.

While the second peace mission was enroute to the reservation,

a band of young renegade Utes raided livestock at the east end of the valley, driving their stolen stock over the ridge to the West Fork of the Duschene River. A posse of "homeguards" led by William Forman gave quick pursuit and came upon the Indians, camped in a little grove 8 miles down the West Fork. The posse members crept close and at a given signal, all fired on the Indians, killing one and wounding several. That one-sided battle nearly proved to be disastrous for Nymphus and the second peace mission.

Capt. Wall and Nymphus were just concluding their talk with Chief Tabby when the Indians who had stolen the stock at Heber City several days before rode into camp, bringing a badly wounded brave with them and shouting news of the warrior who had been killed. Chief Tabby knew that the Indians had caused the fight at the West Fork, but still it was all he could do to restrain his warriors while Capt. Wall and his men broke camp to return to Heber City. Then along the way, in an ill-planned move, the men decided to split up, half going to Strawberry Valley and Daniel's Canyon while the others followed the West Fork of the Duschene to Lake Creek.

In retrospect, it seems to have been a poor plan, but they were anxious to get back to their families as quickly as possible. Half of the men accompanied the wagons, which had to follow the trail across Strawberry Valley. The others, including Capt. Wall, Nymphus and George Bonner took the shorter but more dangerous route home via the Duschene River. Unknown to them, Mormon scouts posted along the high dividing ridge above Heber Valley had reported seeing a band of about a dozen Indians camped in a small grove of aspens near the head

of Lake Creek on the same trail that Capt. Wall, Nymphus and George Bonner were following. The alert was given and twelve men left Heber City on foot during the night, to surround the Indians before they broke camp at daylight.

But during the evening, while the foot posse was still climbing Lake Creek, the Indians broke camp and moved on. Just at dark Capt. Wall and his little party came to the recently abandoned Indian camp and decided it was a good place to stop for the night. The posse from Heber City was unaware that the Indian camp was now occupied by their neighbors and friends, and hurried in their race against time to surround it before sunrise. Just as daylight broke over the eastern ridge, Nymphus aroused the others and began breaking camp. Unknown to him, the Heber City posse had secreted themselves on the mountainside above and were ready to attack what they believed to be an Indian camp.

In the dim light of early dawn the possemen opened fire, and Nymphus was the first to fall. He was shot through the left wrist and right leg, one bullet shattering the shin bone. George Bonner was shot in the thigh. Capt. Wall experienced a miraculous escape from death. A bullet ripped through his heavy leather vest and struck the back of his belt buckle, and then ricocheted in a circle around his body, bouncing back and forth between his vest and belt, making nine holes in his shirt, but never breaking the skin. It was nothing less than a miracle that he wasn't killed.

Both sides were shouting, and it took only an instant for the possemen to realize that they were firing on their friends. It was over in less than a minute, so short an encounter that Capt. Wall and

his men never had time to fire a shot in return. Both Nymphus and George Bonner were badly wounded and the others had a hard time getting them down the steep, rocky canyon to help at Heber City. For a few days it was believed that Nymphus' wounds might prove to be fatal, but his rugged pioneer constitution and Joseph's sincere prayers turned what could have been a tragedy into just another of the many adventures he and Joseph shared during pioneer days on the Mormon frontier.⁽⁵⁾

Indian raids on settler's livestock continued throughout the summer, but on a smaller scale. The settlers were more vigilant, keeping lookout guards stationed along the high ridges and at the head of canyons leading into the valley. Dave, though only 11 years old was one who stood guard and carried messages from the high country back to Heber City. He lived to be nearly 100 years old, and at his death was one of the last veterans of the Black Hawk War. Indian Scout Daniel Jones learned that the Indians had been told by Chief Tabby to leave the settlers at Heber City alone, telling them that "Old Murdock is good to our people." They also knew that the settlers there and at Rhoades Valley (Kamas) kept scouts in the mountains at all times.⁽⁶⁾

During August several small raids were made at pastures owned by John Turner and John Lee, and in September Indians actually broke into William Bell's stable and stole two prize mares, but they were unable to control the high spirited animals, so they killed them and left them. In October a band of young warriors brazenly entered a barn at the south end of town and drove several valuable horses away,

escaping over the rugged mountains above Midway and into American Fork Canyon. A posse pursued them across Utah Valley and past Camp Floyd, but lost the trail in Cedar Valley. Between Indian raids Joseph still had to attend to his duties as Bishop, performing weddings, officiating at funerals and blessing new born babies. Two of those born during the Black Hawk War years were his own, Esther Melissa born to Eliza on September 6th, 1865 and Elizibeth Ann to Elizibeth on June 5th, 1866.

One day just after an Indian raid occurred, Joseph was working in his field. A rider raced by yelling that Indians were stealing horses just a short distance away and that a posse was forming to give pursuit. Joseph ran to his house and quickly grabbed a handful of biscuits and pulled a quilt from his bed. The possemen rode deep into the mountains but were unable to catch the raiders. At nightfall they made camp, but when Joseph unrolled his quilt, a woman's red flannel petticoat which had been on the bed and rolled up in the quilt fell to the ground. It created a lot of fun in camp, for the men all made jokes about their much-married Bishop, saying "Old Joseph liked the women so well, he had to take a petticoat to war with him!"⁽⁷⁾

Winter brought a temporary end to the Indian raids at Heber Valley. In an incident during the spring of 1867 Joseph saw an opportunity to end the war. In July, John Cummings captured an Indian in a canyon near town cutting up a beef animal he had just killed. The Indian was brought into town where Joseph talked to him. The Indian had expected to be killed, but Joseph told him that he would be released if he would carry a personal message to Chief Tabby.

The captive agreed and carried Joseph's message, telling Chief Tabby of Joseph's regard and respect for him and reminding him of his love for his Lamanite brothers and how he had always cared for them when they were sick and fed them when they were hungry. He told Tabby of how his own Indian children longed to have peace with their Indian brothers, and that Brigham Young wanted him to meet with Joseph to end the long and needless war between them. The Indian messenger was escorted to the edge of the reservation while Joseph waited for the seeds he had sown to bear fruit.

Soon after Chief Tabby received Joseph's message he began preparing for the journey to Heber Valley. When Indian Agent Pardon Dobbs heard of Tabby's preparations, he tried to meet with him, but Chief Tabby said he would talk only with "Old Murdock"! In mid-August, 1867 Chief Tabby and all of the sub-chiefs he could control rode down into Heber Valley and went directly to Bishop Murdock's home. It was an impressive sight, for riding with Chief Tabby were Bridger Jim, Douglas, Cut-Lip Jim, Tokowaner, Anthiwatts and Old Soweitte, the King of The Utes.⁽⁸⁾ Several hundred braves with squaws and papooses followed close behind. All were invited to set up camp in Joseph's large yard and pasture. John Carroll owned a large vacant lot next to Joseph's property, and there Joseph had a large pit dug where the following day enough cattle were roasted to feed everyone.

Rows of tables were set up and all of Joseph's wives helped by the neighbor women were kept busy keeping the tables loaded with bread and corn and whatever else they could find to feed so many guests. It took a lot of food to feed such a large and hungry band. In the

diary of Sidney Epperson we find, "Women bustled about preparing a feast. Each woman had been asked to bake a dozen loaves of bread, but the item on the menu which really gladdened the Indian's heart was beef. They ate in good humor and what was not consumed was tucked away into sacks and baskets by the squaws." (9)

The feasting and talk lasted all day. While the Indians were partaking of the feast, Joseph and Chief Tabby exchanged a few simple gifts and then went to an upstairs bedroom in his home where after much talk a peace pipe was smoked and a treaty of friendship was signed, ending the war between the settlers at Heber Valley and the Utes. Chief Tabby was well educated and signed his name proudly, while the other Chiefs made their mark. With Joseph's signature, the war was over, but only at Heber Valley and the surrounding towns and settlements, for Chief Tabby acknowledged that he could not control Black Hawk's actions across the rest of the territory. But the treaty at Heber City soon led the way to other treaties, and within a year most of the fighting throughout the territory came to an end. Joseph's policy of fighting with biscuits instead of bullets had served his people well, for while not a single life was lost at Heber Valley, more than 70 settlers had been killed at other places, with several times that number of Indians killed.

On the County Courthouse grounds at Heber City there stands a monument erected by The Daughters Of The Utah Pioneers. On it is the following inscription. "Indian Peace Treaty. In 1864 Indian troubles forced the pioneers to build a fort at Heber. Bishop Joseph S. Murdock, who was friendly with the Indians, invited Chief Tabby to

his home, August 20th, 1867 where a peace treaty was signed, and a barbeque held on John Carroll's lot. This ended Indian depredations in the valley, proving Brigham Young's statement, that it is better to feed the Indians than to fight them." It also brought Hyrum Smith's Patriarchal Blessing true in full, for Joseph Murdock had indeed become a peacemaker between the Saints and the Indians.

After the feasting was done and the Indians had returned to the reservation, Joseph took the treaty he had obtained to Salt Lake City where he presented it to Brigham Young. The Mormon leader was delighted to meet his old friend again and to learn of his success in dealing with Chief Tabby. Outwardly Young seemed cheerful enough, but Joseph sensed that something was troubling him, and asked what was wrong. Brigham's mood changed and he looked worried, and told Joseph that he needed his help again. He told him how Nevada miners, men Joseph knew well from Carson Valley days, were pushing into southern Utah and claiming lands he needed for the Saints, and how their rough and Godless ways were a threat to the settlements the Saints had worked so hard to establish there.

Brigham explained to Joseph that he needed a buffer zone, a line of desert settlements between the Mormons at St. George and the miners moving in from the Nevada desert country. He said that the area was of strategic rather than economic value. He had already sent one party of Saints to settle there, but most couldn't stand the hardships and had left. It was a terrible place, a purgatory, but a place that Brigham needed. He was going to issue a call for a new mission to go to that awful place, and he wanted Joseph to be among them!

Joseph was shocked. He was 45 years old and had already spent a lifetime colonizing the waste places of the Great Basin. He had built homes at a dozen places, only to lose them when another call to move had come. He had seen others prosper and build comfortable homes and establish business's while prosperity always seemed to be just beyond his grasp. He couldn't help but ask himself why he had to start all over again, when others weren't called. But he knew that Brigham Young believed the real test of a man's faith was his willingness to uproot himself and his family time and again if need be, to start life anew whenever his church needed him. So although his mind rebelled at the thought, he said nothing and kept his own counsel.

Joseph was still dazed as he left Brigham Young's office. On his return to Heber City he never had the heart to tell his family of the pending mission call, although they knew that something was troubling him. For the next several weeks he wrestled with his problem alone, waiting for the fall conference in October when he knew the mission call would be announced. By then he had resigned himself to what had to be, for he realized that Brigham needed the experience and expertise he had acquired at Green River, Carson Valley and as Bishop and Mission President of the Provo Valley Mission. And just as important, he also needed his ability to live among the Indians and to gain their friendship.

By the time when conference began, he knew that if Brigham needed him he would go, and he would stick it out to the last man, no matter how hard the way was or even if everyone else deserted and left. He was needed and he would go, and that was that. His mind was at rest

when conference began, but still he couldn't help but wonder where this terrible place was that Brigham called the Muddy River.

Footnotes - Chapter 9

1. Utah's Black Hawk War, Pg 96, Carlton Culmsee, Utah State University Press, Logan, 1973
2. Heart Throbs Of The West, Vol 1, Pg 104, DUP, SLC, 1947
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Indian Depridations In Utah, Pg 250, Peter Gottfredson, 1919
6. Forty Years Among The Indians, Pg 162, Jones, Bookcraft, 1960
7. Journal JSM
8. Ibid
9. Sidney H. Epperson, Pioneer, Pg 50, Ocean Pub. Co., 1941